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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR WASHINGTON VISIT OF TURKISH  
PARLIAMENTARY SPEAKER BULENT ARINC

(U) Classified by Ambassador Eric Edelman; reasons: E.O.  
12958 1.4 (b,d).

11. (C) Summary: Courteous but highly protocol-conscious and volatile Speaker of the Turkish Grand National Assembly Bulent Arinc looks forward to a highly ceremonial May 24-26 visit to Washington at the invitation of Speaker of the House Hastert. What matters above all to Arinc, who sees his visit as advancing his domestic political fortunes, is his hosts' attention to high protocol over substance. A firm Islamist who remains seriously misinformed about U.S. policies despite our continuing efforts to enlighten him, Arinc is nevertheless impressionable if the reception is warm. End summary.

12. (C) Turkish Grand National Assembly Chairman (Speaker) Arinc has tirelessly sought an invitation from House Speaker Hastert for the past two-and-a-half years, and eagerly awaits from his May 24-26 visit what he expects will be the pomp and circumstance he considers his due as the number two in protocolary order in Turkey.

13. (C) A main figure in ruling AK Party (AKP), Arinc will aim to use his visit for two domestic purposes. First, to solidify his political position against his principal intraparty rivals, PM Erdogan and FonMin Gul. In this regard, Arinc forced Erdogan and Gul to accept his candidacy as Speaker in 2002 and again in 2004; Erdogan and Gul see him as a trouble-maker and he apparently has enough sway over 20-40 MPs from the Islamist Milli Gorus line to determine whether they stay in AKP or bolt to rival Islamist Saadet Party. Second, to burnish what he considers to be strong credentials to be elected president in spring 2007 or to make a run for the prime ministership if Erdogan seeks the presidency.

14. (C) The visit gives us an opportunity to work on the firmly Islamist heart and mind of this outwardly-courteous (he will be on his best behavior), influential but exceptionally volatile figure. At the same time the visit also presents Washington with a series of challenges in determining how to satisfy his ultra-sensitivity to protocol and his prickly Islamist instincts over issues of central importance to the U.S.: Iraq (through deliberate parliamentary maneuvering Arinc played a key role in ensuring that the March 1, 2003 vote on deployment of U.S. troops failed to garner enough votes to pass; he considered the Fallujah operation an abomination and persists in believing the U.S. has killed more than 100,000 civilians in Iraq), BMENA, the war on terrorism, religious freedom.

15. (C) What matters for Arinc is not substance but form. The thickness of the red carpet, the graciousness of his hosts (offering tea, coffee or soft drinks at every, repeat every, meeting is essential; Arinc has refused to visit the Embassy since we omitted to offer him tea at a group meeting here months before the November 2002 elections), and the warmth of ceremony are paramount. In this context, and in the spirit of paying court to his overweening pride, we should be ready to listen patiently to his formulaic perorations. We should expect that he will not absorb nuanced messages but at the same time he will react sharply to any messages he perceives as being delivered in a lecturing or disputatious manner. The key is to appeal more to his heart than his head.

16. (C) A final note on Arinc's volatile personality. Although he is of at least part Kurdish origin he obscures this fact. A product of a narrow Islamist environment in high school and university (he studied law at prestigious Ankara University), he puts heavy emphasis on his Muslim identity but also professes a sensitivity to perceived slights toward Turkey. Always considered a firebrand with strong rhetorical gifts, he remains popular among the more Islamist core of AKP's grassroots. The volatility in his personality increased markedly with the 1996 death in an auto accident of a son, a loss that appears permanently to have shattered him (two children survive) and to have darkened his attachment to Islam.

17. (U) Suggested points:

--Bilateral Relations: Welcome uninterrupted cooperation in

Afghanistan, Balkans, on Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline, Cyprus, and war on terrorism; U.S. will continue to support Turkey's EU candidacy; need for Turkish government to lead public opinion in defending and promoting our bilateral relations just as the U.S. government is doing.

--Religious Freedom: A key issue for us and for EU; we look for Turkey to re-open the Ecumenical Patriarchate's Halki seminary under conditions acceptable to the Patriarchate; call on Turkey to give Christian, Jewish and other so-called minority foundations unhindered ability to retain the properties they have and to reclaim properties expropriated by the Turkish State; and express our concern about tendentious campaigns against missionaries.

--Iraq: Important to recognize the progress the Iraqis are making in forging a democratic, inclusive system in a unified country despite continuing terrorist attacks; we are determined to help the Iraqis overcome the terrorist threat; appreciate that Turkey now also accepts the need for a Baghdad-centered policy.

--BMENA Initiative: Welcome Turkey as a partner in encouraging democratic change, rule of law, civil society, and open markets in the broader region.

--War on Terrorism and Counter-Proliferation: Appreciate Turkey's cooperation in war on terrorism; as you know, the U.S. supports the Anglo-French-German diplomatic initiative to get Iran to comply fully with IAEA rules and to desist from any attempt to acquire nuclear weapons and we look for equally vigorous support from Turkey.

--Syria: Reflecting close U.S.-EU ties, France co-sponsored with us UNSC Res. 1559 calling for withdrawal of all Syrian troops and intel services from Lebanon; UN Secretary General is calling on all countries to avoid giving Syria room to renege; Syria continues to harbor terrorists and to allow infiltration of terrorists into Iraq; we look to Turkey to join the rest of the world community in pressing Syria to remove all intel forces from Lebanon, stop supporting terrorists, and get rid of its weapons of mass destruction.

EDELMAN